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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PTER PREF FR CO

SUBJECT: GOC REITERATES RULES OF THE GAME FOR CHAVEZ AND FARC

Classified By: CDA Brian A Nichols - Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (S) Summary. Peace Commissioner Restrepo said he and President Uribe repeatedly told Venezuelan President Chavez the GOC will not consider a demilitarized zone as part of a deal for a "humanitarian exchange" with the FARC. The FARC does not want to meet with Chavez in Venezuela (preferring Colombia), because a Caracas meeting would show a demilitarized zone is not needed for the exchange. Chavez tried to convince Uribe to separate out the three U.S. citizens held by the FARC and subsequently pressed Uribe to ask the USG to return FARC members convicted in the United States as part of a deal. Restrepo said Uribe told Chavez the Americans must be included and refused to ask the USG to return FARC convicts Sonia and Simon. Chavez said he would ask French President Sarkozy to press the USG on the convict issue. An initial meeting between Chavez and the FARC (likely Raul Reyes) is reportedly set for October 8 in Caracas. End summary.

GOC Rules of the Game: "No Despeje"

¶2. (C) Restrepo told us since the GOC's acceptance of Chavez as a facilitator, the GOC has sought to establish and maintain specific rules of game vis-a-vis Chavez and the FARC. Restrepo met with Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Ali Rodriguez in Cuba prior to the August 31 Uribe-Chavez meeting to stress the GOC will not accept a demilitarized zone ("despeje"). Uribe publicly stated in his August 31 meeting with Chavez--and beforehand--that the GOC would not accept a despeje. Restrepo reiterated this message in September 7 meetings with Chavez and DISIP chief Henry Rangel Silva in Caracas. Restrepo told Chavez the GOC could offer the FARC security and other guarantees within Venezuela's borders, but could make no such commitments inside Colombia. He told Rangel, "just as your job is to protect Chavez, my job is to protect Uribe."

¶3. (C) Restrepo said the FARC does not want to meet with Chavez in Caracas, because this would show a despeje is not needed for agreement on a humanitarian accord. Still, FARC leaders do not think they can rebuff Chavez' initiative. Chavez told Uribe on August 31 the FARC had sent a message that without a despeje there could be no talks.

Why Allow Chavez In?

¶4. (S) Restrepo said Uribe believed Chavez would have become

involved in the FARC process sooner or later. It was better to involve him when the GOC could set the terms. This will allow the GOC to manage the French and to block a proposal by authorized intermediary Senator Piedad Cordoba that Europeans and other Latin leaders participate. He said Chavez wants a quick success to enhance his image as he deals with constitutional reform, economic difficulties, and the creation of a unified socialist party at home. Uribe thinks he can exploit Chavez' need to produce results to press the FARC and obtain other benefits, including Venezuelan return to the Andean Community, possible resolution of a territorial dispute, and bi-national energy projects. Restrepo said Chavez' fears that the FARC might encourage radical Chavista elements without his approval also gave him an incentive to press the group. Still, Chavez' paranoia that the United States will use Colombian territory to sponsor an irregular invasion of Venezuela ("contra" style) complicates his involvement. Under this scenario, Chavez would not press the FARC because he wants to maintain an irregular fighting force that could help deter such a USG move.

U.S. Hostages Must be Included in Deal

¶ 15. (S) Chavez tried to convince Uribe on August 31 that the three US hostages held by the FARC should be excluded from his efforts. If the Americans were to be included, Chavez said, Uribe would need to insist that the USG return "Sonia" and "Simon Trinidad" (convicted in the United States of drug and terrorism charges, respectively) as part of a deal. Uribe said there could be no separation of the US hostages, and he could not include the return Sonia and Simon in a deal. Chavez said he would urge French President Nicolas Sarkozy to raise this issue with the USG. Restrepo said Chavez' opposition to including the three Amcits in a deal

softened when Cordoba mentioned that a member of the U.S. Congress expressed interest in organizing a meeting between U.S. hostage families and Chavez.

Next Steps

¶ 16. (C) Restrepo said former-Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin will handle the initiative with the FARC for Chavez, and that the GOV's contact with the FARC is in a preliminary phase. Chavez accepted a formula for talks on August 31, and reaffirmed on September 7, that: 1) Chavez receives a FARC emissary in Caracas, 2) urges FARC to make a good-faith gesture such as releasing some hostages, and 3) sets up a meeting on the Colombia-Venezuela border to start negotiations on a final deal. Restrepo said the GOC would not accept a FARC office in Caracas as part of the process. After a meeting between Cordoba and the FARC's Reyes late in the week of September 10, the media reported that an initial meeting between Chavez and FARC spokesman Raul Reyes is set for October 8, in Caracas (septel).

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